

Dangerous Accusations

SCOTT HOEZEE

In this series, we are following Jesus in Luke's Gospel as he journeys to Jerusalem and to the cross. Along the way, we will see Jesus having many interesting encounters and exchanges; but in the passage we are looking at today on *Groundwork*, we find something that is finally downright startling. Jesus' critics accuse him of being in cahoots with the Devil. Now, many people during Jesus' lifetime failed to recognize him as the Son of God in the flesh, and that is sad enough, but to go the other way and claim that Jesus is actually an agent of the Devil, well, that is breathtaking. Why did people say that? What did Jesus say in reply and how does it all fit with the larger story that is headed to the cross? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Dave, in the first episode of this series, we saw how, right at the end of Luke 9, Jesus resolutely turns toward Jerusalem and he begins the long journey of all that awaits him there. Since that time, we have skipped over a couple of things, but since then, Jesus sent out 72 disciples. They did some amazing kingdom work. Jesus told the now famous parable of the Good Samaritan, and then in the first part of the chapter we are looking at today, Luke 11, Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer. So, lots of interesting and wonderful material going on in this section of Luke, most of which is unique to Luke's Gospel, too.

DAVE BAST

Right. If we hit every single passage and every single parable, we would be here for a long, long time, but we are trying to fit this into the seven weeks of Lent. We have skipped a number of things, but we are not going to skip a really hard passage just to prove to you that we are not cherry-picking and just taking all of the easy stuff. Here is a passage from Luke Chapter 11, where Jesus has an encounter with a demon and then an even more disturbing encounter with his critics afterwards. So, I will begin at verse 14:

Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke and the crowd was amazed. ¹⁵But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." ¹⁶Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. ¹⁷Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. ¹⁸If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul; ¹⁹now, if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So, then, they will be your judges. ²⁰But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. Interesting story that begins, as they say in literary terms, *in medias res*; the story is already in motion. We are told Jesus is driving out a demon – one day, while he was driving out a demon – and the...

DAVE BAST

And the demon was mute, Luke says. How did they know that it was a demon if the guy could not talk?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; well, it is sort of curious that the man was mute; the man could not speak, and so apparently they concluded he had a demon that was preventing him from speaking, and maybe the demon itself was mute; it is a curious connection. We do know that in Jesus' day there were a lot of conditions that were attributed to demon possession. They may or may not have always been right about that. It may have been some sickness that we would identify today as a sickness; but, there were many other occasions when they were correct about it; and certainly when Jesus recognized someone as having a demon, he was always correct.

DAVE BAST

In the world of Jesus, in the world of the New Testament certainly, the demonic was prevalent, and Jesus, as you point out, was the expert diagnostician; and in this case, he knew what was afflicting this sufferer, this man who was mute – actually, Matthew adds that he was blind, as well – was due to an evil spirit, so Jesus being Jesus, delivers him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes. It is obvious what has happened. People – we are told they were amazed, they were astonished, and yet some of them, it seems, without missing a beat, some of them said: Oh, well, you know, it takes one to know one. He is using the power of the Devil to drive out the Devil. He is using something that they called Beelzebul, or some bibles have Beelzebub, which seems to be a buzz name or code name for the chief of demons.

DAVE BAST

Yes, Beelzebub is actually – or Beelzebul – the name, as you point out, occurs both ways – was one of the main gods of the Philistines – the idol that was worshipped in the Philistine city of Ekron, actually. In the Old Testament already, for Jews this became a code word for the power of evil; for the Devil himself. They said it mockingly because one of the possible translations of Beelzebub is *lord of the flies*, as if to say: Your gods are nothing but garbage, and you worshipers, you are like a crowd of flies buzzing around them. So, it was kind of an insult; a double insult when applied to Jesus. I mean, it is just mind-blowing. How could people be so hostile, so dead set against him, that when they see him heal this poor sufferer, they attribute it to the Devil? It is the Devil that is enabling him to do this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we will think in a moment, Dave, in the next segment, that is a very, very terrible thing to claim about anybody, but certainly about Jesus; but it is amazing that they did that. And then we are also told, then some said: Well, why don't you give us a sign from heaven so we will know whose side you are on, basically, and that, in a sense, leaves Jesus stumped. They had just seen a sign from heaven. What do they think driving out a demon is, if not the triumph of God? The triumph of heaven over hell, the triumph of God over the Devil. So, these people say: Let's check out your credentials by giving us a sign from heaven. What can you say? Jesus just gave them a sign. So, it is breathtaking that they missed it; they almost missed the power of the miracle, and they have turned everything on its head by saying Jesus is allied with and in cahoots with the very type of being he drove out.

DAVE BAST

That was a consistent criticism – or request maybe we should say – that Jesus confronted throughout his ministry. People were always asking him to prove it: Come on, prove it. Prove it. You are making all these claims; you are walking around giving us all these teachings; how can we know? Can you give us definite evidence?

Actually, there is a very interesting passage in John 5, where Jesus talks about the things that testify – that are the proofs of what he says he is and who he says he is – and the first thing that he points to are the acts that he does. So, he is telling them: Look at what I have just done. If you want proof... You know, it ain't bragging if you can do it, as the saying goes. So, he says to a man, "I forgive your sins," and people are scandalized, and then he says: All right; get up and walk! And that is exactly what is going on here, but his

enemies are so hostile that they absolutely turn it on its head and will not see it. We will look at how he replies to them in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and Dave, we are looking today at Luke 11 at a time when Jesus cast a demon out, only immediately to be accused of doing that miracle by the power of the Devil himself; as though Jesus is in league with Satan, essentially. I don't know about you, but I think if anybody ever made an accusation like that against me, in any way, shape or form, I would be furious. I would be angry. I would want to respond in kind. But Jesus does not do that.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I think you are right. I would be the same way. It is hard enough for me to get gentle criticism, but if somebody said, "You are the Devil," which is essentially what they are saying to Jesus, "You are the Devil," and, in fact, he is the Son of God. It is mind-boggling.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Really, this is the essence of... When I was in seminary and we talked about taking God's name in vain from the Ten Commandments, and so forth, and you talk about blasphemy – the essence of blasphemy is attributing – it is basically robbing God of his holiness, in that you attribute God's work to something else, or you chalk up God's work as the Devil's work, because what happens with blasphemy is you turn the world upside down; and what is holy is now profane and vice versa; and blasphemy is always such a serious thing because it is awfully hard to reach people with holiness if they can only regard it as evil. If they live in such a moral inversion, a morally upside-down world, that light is dark and dark is light, good is evil and evil is good, it is hard to reach them with anything like love or God's holiness because they have made themselves immune.

So, this is a very serious charge, and yet, Jesus does not respond the way you and I just said we might; he responds, actually, rather logically and rather calmly.

DAVE BAST

Very calmly, and he starts by asking them: Now, wait a minute; look at what you are saying here. Stop for a minute and think about this accusation you have just made. Why would an agent of Satan work against Satan? So, he uses an analogy: A house that is divided against itself cannot stand. As if he say: If you have one household and the family is fighting, the husband and the wife are at daggers with each other or maybe in a country if there is a civil war. Incidentally, I have just reminded myself, one of Abraham Lincoln's most famous speeches that he delivered in 1858 was called the *House Divided* speech; and he alluded to this saying of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You took the words right out of my mouth; I was just going to say that.

Right, in a civil war everybody loses, is Lincoln's point. Really, north, south, and the civil war in the United States in the 19th century – nobody can win; we are killing ourselves; it is a self-inflicted wound. Jesus, again very logically says: You are not even making sense. That is such a silly thing to charge me with because clearly the Devil would not be at cross purposes with himself. But, what I think we should think about just for a minute, Dave, in this segment yet is what that reaction says about Jesus, and in the final segment of this program I think we will talk a little bit about lessons that we can draw from that.

How did Jesus react to the sin and the evil that he encountered every single day? I may even have made this analogy before on *Groundwork*, but I have often said, if you know as much about music as I do, then you can go to a symphony orchestra concert and not hear many of the musical mistakes that somebody who knows music a lot better would hear; and even that person would not hear as many musical mistakes as the conductor would hear; but nobody would hear all of the mistakes made on a given performance of a Beethoven piece than Beethoven himself. The composer knows it perfectly.

Well, Jesus is in a sense the composer of the symphony of creation. He heard every dropped note that ever happened in his presence. He saw every sin; he detected everything that was out of tune with how God wanted his creation to be; and yet, he was never a screamer about it. He was not grumpy. He was not walking around wagging his finger and screaming judgment every day, even though nobody was more aware of sin than he was.

DAVE BAST

Right; one of the names that the Old Testament gives that has been applied to Jesus often is the Man of Sorrows. You just think of how hurtful it must have been for him to live in a world like ours and to go through an experience like this and to be so sensitive. Some people are super sensitive to light or to sound, and he was super sensitive to sin. How galling it must have been and how painful; and yet, as we have been pointing out here, he responds in a remarkably gentle way. In fact, if you read Matthew's version of this same encounter – it is there in Matthew Chapter 12 – he says one of the most difficult things that he ever said anywhere. He talks about the unpardonable sin; this sin against the Holy Spirit, as it is described there; but he also says in the same breath: If you sin against me – if you sin against the Son of Man – if you speak a word against the Son of Man, you will be forgiven; but if you sin against the Holy Spirit, wow, watch out for that! Somehow, what is going on here, even the direct criticism of him, it is as if he is saying: That can be forgiven; that can be forgiven. Your blasphemy, as horrible as it is, can be forgiven. What cannot be forgiven is if you so harden yourself against the witness of God's Spirit to the truth, against God's grace coming to you, offered to you in the Spirit, then you are lost indeed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, and you will – one of the reasons you are lost is you will never recognize the truth of Jesus' last statement in the verses that you read a little while ago, Dave, in the first segment. Jesus very logically says: Of course I am not using the power of Beelzebub, the lord of the demons, or the lord of the air, to defeat Beelzebub. That is a house divided against itself. That is self defeating. It would never... I am not doing it that way; however, if I am doing it by the finger of God (and by the way, he is). Then he says: Then the kingdom of God has come upon you. That is a kicker of a statement to end it with. In other words, these people are in the presence of God's own kingdom and they are missing it, and you can only pray they will not miss it forever; but, what a remarkable thing to claim, that the very kingdom of God was there, and yet, the people were missing it. They were attributing it to the kingdom of Beelzebub instead. What a terrible and sad thing it is to miss the living presence of God's kingdom when it comes right upon you.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and I think that is what we want to think about in just a moment as we wrap up this program. What kinds of lessons does this story have for us? Surely, chief among them is the important point of not missing out on what God is doing in the world, or possibly in your life and for you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We will explore all of that when we come back.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Hi, you are listening to *Groundwork*. Along with Scott Hoezee, I am Dave Bast, and we have just been looking today at rather an odd story from Luke Chapter 11, Jesus casting a demon out of a man who could not speak, and then being accused of being in cahoots with the Devil; of using Satan's own power in order to act against the forces of evil, and Jesus points out, this is ridiculous. That would be absurd. What you are actually seeing is God in your presence; God among you; God bringing his kingdom before your very eyes, and you are in danger of missing it. We want to be sure we are not in danger of that same thing, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In danger of missing it and in danger of going the other way by attributing it to the presence of Satan instead of the presence of God. I think the first thing to notice is we are doing this series for Lent in this part of Luke,

and as we said, we began at Luke 9; this is all what is happening to Jesus as he walks to the cross. This is Luke's framework for here. So, Jesus is on his way to Golgotha; he is on his way to Calvary, to the Place of the Skull, ultimately, and these are some of the things that happened to him along the way. So, here is an incident – one thing we can observe, I think, about this story in Luke 11, and his actually being called in cahoots with the Devil – here is an example of why that journey to the cross was necessary. How bad off is this world? How riddled with falsehood and deception is this world? Well, Luke is saying through this story, it is this bad; that Jesus can do a divine miracle of God by driving out a devil, and then still be called the Devil himself. That is how bad it is, and that is why only a terrible sacrifice of God's Son on the cross has any hope to set things to right.

DAVE BAST

Well, here is something else, I think; at least, this is what it sparks in me and my reaction to the story. If we are honest, probably we are all personally guilty of being critical of people in the church, of other pastors or preachers; especially maybe celebrity preachers; of knocking what is going on in the name of the kingdom, of being critical and snide and dismissive; and I know I am capable of all those things.

You know, it ought to give us pause lest we attribute to something else what is actually the finger of God – the work of God going on among us, and because of our own, perhaps jealousy or envy or simple cantankerousness. Here are these religious people who are absolutely dismissing Jesus. I may have said this, too, on *Groundwork* before, but I have always been impressed by the fact that when Jesus said to the disciples, "One of you will betray me," eleven of them said, "Lord, is it I?" Nobody said, "Lord, is it Judas?" but, "Lord, is it I?" And that is a good question, especially again for Lent, that is a reflective question: "Lord, am I guilty of doing this? Have I done this before? Please show me; help me to repent."

SCOTT HOEZEE

You mentioned a minute ago, Dave, maybe high-profile preachers or Christian figures, and how we tend to – for whatever the reason – we tend to pile on such people; we all watch them very closely for mistakes or we criticize them; and – I will not say what it was – in reference to a church that was growing by leaps and bounds and had a very dynamic preacher, and there were a lot of people in some of the circles that I hung out with that were very, very critical of this church; very, very critical of the pastor; just looking for everything they could... and a friend of mine had a standard response to that. He was kind of like Jesus in the story; he was very calm and he would just say to people, "Look, the Gospel is being preached; people are doing tremendous acts of service in God's name; the church has a tremendous outreach program to hungry people around the world; I just have to conclude: That is of God," and that was his final line. It is sort of like Jesus here, "That is the finger of God." This is a sign of the presence of the kingdom and we can miss it. That is the second thing we can think about practically to apply this interesting story. It is possible to miss the presence of God's kingdom. The Pharisees missed it in Jesus' day because they were hung up on the rules. Other people were missing it because they just could not believe that Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph's son, could possibly be the Messiah; but, the question we turn on ourselves is: What causes us, even in the Church today, to sometimes miss the kingdom? Is it because we are not doing the work, or somebody is doing something better than we are and deep down we are envious, and so we are not celebrating... The last thing we ever want to do is miss the presence of the kingdom, and it is always a good self-check to say, "Am I? And what is causing me to not celebrate, but instead criticize something that is clearly of God?"

DAVE BAST

Right. Well, here is a third point, I think, and it is the example that Jesus offers us. There is a wonderful passage in 1 Peter Chapter 2. Peter explicitly says that Jesus suffered for us, not only in order to pay for our sins and win forgiveness and all those things – to defeat evil – all the wonderful things that come from the cross; but also to leave us an example that we would follow in his steps, Peter says; and he points out that when he was reviled, he did not revile in return, but he trusted to the One who judges justly. And I think that is true, not just for the cross at the end, and all of the insults that he bore, but the way he responded during his life, even to a criticism like this; even to this blasphemous suggestion; his gentle turning aside of that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Certainly there is a lesson for all of us today. Today we can look at very flagrant examples of whole churches that build their identity around showing up at public rallies to decry this sin or that sin or protesting at funerals. So, we can see some really blatant examples of people who are somehow missing this example of Jesus, who just took it, took it, took it; absorbed, absorbed, absorbed; and nevertheless consistently showed compassion and not harsh judgmentalism; but beyond the gross examples out there, we all need to wonder: Indeed, are we able to respond to one another's foibles, to one another's sins, to the sins of the larger world outside the church; can we reach out to them in the kind of loving, calm, compassion that Jesus showed here? To often, though, on split-screens on TV you get religious figures sparing; and we get these screaming matches and shouting matches. It just does not look like the way Jesus reacted when he bumped into even something as bad as what we saw him bump into here in Luke Chapter 11.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and I do not think that means we have to compromise or...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

Or stifle our convictions or ...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we witness to the truth.

DAVE BAST

or gloss over... Right; we bear witness, but we do it in a spirit of gentleness and honoring God, who is the ultimate judge. The reason we can do that, as Peter says of Jesus, because he trusted the One who will judge justly. So in the end, it is all going to come out in the wash and God himself will put things to right.

Well, anyway, that is our *Groundwork* program for today. Thanks for joining the conversation. I am Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee. We would like to know how we can help you continue digging into scripture; so, visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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